

## **Opening Statement**

**Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), Chairman  
Committee on Education & the Workforce**

### **Markup of H.R. 609, the College Access & Opportunity Act**

**July 20, 2005**

Good morning. Thank you all for being here as we take up legislation that is critical to millions of American college students, and all American taxpayers.

Forty years ago, Congress established the Higher Education Act to ensure all students, regardless of financial circumstance, would have the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education. Regretfully, the Higher Education Act has strayed from this mission in recent years.

Far too much federal student aid is awarded to meet the status quo, and not to meet the students' needs. We have nearly as many new loans going to graduates as we have going to students. Campus-based aid programs are more focused on past participation than future student need. Institutions of higher education aren't recognized equally under the law, and students suffer the consequences. This is unacceptable, and it's time to change course. We must restore the Higher Education Act to its original mission, and make students priority number one.

In the past two years, we've conducted an exhaustive effort to carefully consider solutions to reform and strengthen federal higher education programs. We've held two dozen hearings and conducted site visits across the country. We've reached out to the higher education community and looked to build consensus wherever possible.

The time for hearings is over, and the time for action is now. This year, through reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, Congress must seize the opportunity to reassess our priorities and realign our programs to better focus on students. The College Access & Opportunity Act is fundamentally about expanding college access for low- and middle-income students, and enacting these reforms is essential.

Last week, Rep. McKeon led consideration of the bill in subcommittee. What emerged from that effort was a stronger bill and a spirit of openness and bipartisan cooperation. The evidence of that cooperation is the striking number of amendments that were withdrawn so that we could work together to find solutions. We've reached agreement on a number of these issues, and they're reflected in the substitute today. While we certainly don't agree on everything, there is no mistaking the willingness of Members on both sides to work together on issues where we can find agreement and develop a bill that is better for students.

One thing that we should all agree on is the importance of producing a bill that is fiscally sound, and will put the federal aid programs on a firm financial footing. Congress has pledged this year to rein in out of control spending and unnecessary federal programs. This Committee is

playing a part in that effort, because out of control entitlement spending is a threat to every student and family in America.

The Higher Education Act is an ideal place to begin restoring fiscal sanity by making better use of the resources we're already investing. The College Access & Opportunity Act *increases* benefits to students and *increases* college access. We do this while eliminating excess subsidies to lenders and curbing programs that don't serve students or taxpayers well. We're putting students at the front of the line when it comes to federal higher education programs, and we're demanding greater efficiency and effectiveness from our investment.

This bill also makes fairness a top priority for students by equalizing the two student loan programs, reducing fees for students, and promoting fair competition to ensure programs and student benefits will continue to improve.

I'd like to thank Rep. Miller for being here today, and recognize him for his commitment to the issue of college access. He and I have worked together in the past when no one thought it was possible, and I believe we'll work together today to produce a better bill.

I'd also like to thank 21st Century Competitiveness Subcommittee Chairman Buck McKeon for working closely with me to develop this bill and bring it to this point today. He and Rep. Kildee deserve great credit for working together and always working with a spirit of cooperation.

Finally, I'd like to recognize the staff members who have played such an important role in this process. Alison Griffin and Amy Raaf have worked tirelessly to produce this bill, sharing their time and resources with the higher education community to ensure an open process and develop a strong bill. I would be remiss if I didn't also recognize our former staff member Kathleen Smith. Kathleen left the Committee in January, but her two years of hard work and policy expertise left an indelible print on this legislation and she deserves our thanks as well. I'd also like to recognize Ellyne Bannon with Rep. Miller's staff, who has shared in the long hours and hard work to bring us here today.

Four decades ago, the Higher Education Act was established to ensure college access for low- and middle-income students. Today, I believe we'll produce a bill that will live up to that legacy.

I'd now like to recognize Rep. Miller for his opening statement.